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ABSTRACT

Because students often come to a literary text without the prerequisite knowledge to understand or explicate it fully, they can be thought of as outsiders, needing the help of insiders, or experts in literature, to "learn the text's secrets." Moreover, students often do not fully comprehend how much of literature rests on symbolism that demands special knowledge to fully appreciate it. However, literature, particularly Western literature, has a history of using symbolism that has rendered works readable at a surface level as well as an inner, more complex level. The parables of the Good Samaritan, for instance, can be read as advice to care for one's neighbors, or as an analogy for divine love and the Second Coming. John Bunyan, Jonathan Swift, and Henry Fielding also implant mysteries or "secrets" in their work, partly for the amusement of becoming an "insider" by untangling literary puzzles, and partly in imitation of the Biblical notion of the incomprehensibility of God. Teachers can assist students in becoming insiders by acquainting them gradually with the idea of symbols. The use of popular songs or poetry in the classroom can help them feel comfortable with the idea of symbols. (JC)

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Insiders and Outsiders: Teachers and Students Confront the Text

Blakeney J. Richard

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Insiders and Outsiders: Teachers and Students Confront the Text

I want to talk to you today about the problem of interpreting literature, but my particular subject requires that I divide the world into two categories of people, those who know what's going on and those who don't really know. And I want to call these two groups insiders and outsiders. Eventually, I'll focus on the problem of secrecy in literature, but before I do I want to suggest that insiders and outsiders really belong to the world at large, that they're not confined to the literature classroom. As interpreters of literature we simply reflect a much larger dilemma about how to get at the truth of anything because the world we inhabit is filled with insiders who keep secrets from those who are outsiders. And I don't mean that English teachers deliberately keep secrets, but the books that we try to teach are full of secrets, and somehow we get caught up in the business.

Sometimes, though, the secrets out there in the world get out, in spite of the efforts of insiders to keep those secrets from getting out. Let me give you some examples. Georgie Anne Geyer, who writes for Universal Press Syndicate, wrote in August about an interview she had with Juan Bosch, the leader of the Dominican Republic's Liberation Party. Ms. Geyer writes that

> Bosch, a man who has seen his dreams wasted, even in his bitterness points to some disturbing realities in the Caribbean today.
>
> "Here," he says, rocking in his rocking chair, "politics is a business, a business exactly like having a store of shoes or clothing, or a supermarket. There is no feeling of responsibility."
>
> There is more truth to this statement [Ms. Geyer says] than we would like to believe. . . .
>
> If Bosch, in his elliptical way, is right, the democracy that we all want in the Caribbean may be meeting the real new problems in the area like ships that pass in the night, leaving the political and social vacuums that God only knows who or what will fill.
>
> (Corpus Christi Caller 8/22/86)

Here is another example of insider information that appeared in the papers in July:

> For more than four decades, the federal government assured the residents of eastern Washington that the nuclear weapons activities at its Hanford Reservation posed no hazard to the public's health or safety.
>
> Now, however, the government's own documents show that those claims were fraudulent--and people who once trusted federal officials are furious about being deceived and exposed to life-threatening doses of radiation. . . .
>
> When the federal government reluctantly relinquished 19,000 pages of documents this year [under the Freedom of Information Act], the disclosures were startling. Among them:

--Between 1944 and 1969 major releases of iodine 131 totaled at least 1.1 million curies. . . .

--Many of the discharges were accidental, but in 1949 Hanford officials deliberately released 5,000 curies of iodine 131 as part of a bizarre scheme to locate nuclear bomb production in the Soviet Union.

--There were at least nine major releases of ruthenium 106. . . .

--In the spring of 1957, an average of 34,000 curies of various fission products escaped daily into the Columbia River, which traverses the reservation. (The Daily Advertiser 7/22/86, Lafayette, La.)

I've left out most of the article; but this, at least, is the gist of it. Last July Howard Cosell had this to say about the trial that resulted when the USFL took the NFL to courtfor its monopolizing professional football: (Corpus Christi Caller 8/27/86)

Late last Wednesday night the phone rang. "Howard," said a male voice thick with fear, "I just read your column. The one about television executives and perjury in federal court. Oh, my God, every word of it is true, totally true."

"I know," I replied.

He hesitated, afraid to go further, afraid to ask me if I would go further, name names, point the finger. So I spoke into the silence.

"You should have testified," I said. "You should have done the right thing, come forward and told the truth about television and the NFL."

"Howard, my God, I've got a wife and family to take care of. If I did that, I'd lose my job. I'd never work in television sports again."

In early August, this article appeared in the Corpus Christi Caller Times:

It is the cry of rage against the cluttered loneliness of his life, the lament of a soul sorrowful over unfulfilled expectations. It is a priest's story, a modern testament of inner torment.

The anguish is vented with stunning force in a bold essay published in the new issue of St. Anthony Messenger, a national monthly magazine operated by the Franciscan Roman Catholic religious order.

"If I had a son [this priest writes] would I want him to become a priest? Regrettably, my answer has to be, "No," contends the author, a pastor of a 1,000-family Midwestern parish. "At least in the United States, the Roman Catholic priesthood is a dying profession."

The priest, who professes that his 14 years of ordained ministry have been largely "happy and fulfilling," writes under a pseudonym for fear of potential "harassment" for painting such a dismal picture of the current state of holy orders in Catholicism and for forcefully advancing controversial remedies for the ministerial malaise.

He acknowledges that his point of view, though widely shared by clerics, could provoke a "firestorm of indignation . . . particularly from the Church hierarchy who keep maintaining that all is well with the priesthood--that we are simply going through a historical cycle of decline."

So with these examples of secrets that inhabit the larger world outside the classroom, with these examples behind me, and if you will grant me my conclusion that the world we live in is full of such secrets, I want to turn now to the problem of secrecy inside the classroom, secrecy within a given literary text, and the problem of ferreting out from a text the secrets of that text.

In a poem of his entitled "Directive," Robert Frost says this:

> I have kept hidden at the instep arch
> Of an old cedar at the waterside
> A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
> Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
> So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.

What Frost is talking about here, especially when he refers to "the wrong ones," has to do with insiders and outsiders, also with what insiders do and with what outsiders have to do to become insiders. Frost here is talking about salvation, not religious salvation that St. Mark writes about, but the kind of salvation that his poetry offers to us. Our job as English teachers, then, involves lifting the spell that writers like Frost cast over their own writings so that the students who are in our care and who by definition are outsiders may, if they are worthy students and if we are effective teachers, become insiders.

My topic is prompted by those instances in the classroom where students contend that what we are saying about a poem or other literary work is just our opinion. They, after all, have opinions too, which, in their opinion, are just as good as ours. So my concern here today is an effort to provide you with a better understanding of the historical context within which we all operate so that our students, in turn, will be more receptive to us as interpreters of literature. To give you an example of the kind of student protest I have in mind I want to pull an episode out of The Saturday Review that occurred some years ago. John Ciardi wrote a rather detailed and very fine analysis of Robert Rost's poem entitled "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." His article generated a lot of letters to the editor by way of response. The following two letters were typical of the two types of reaction:

> Dear Sir:
>
> The article "Robert Frost: The Way to the Poem," by John Ciardi . . . is one of the most excellent pieces of explication I have had an opportunity to read. It is simple, thorough, and clear, and at the same time provocative of response of the deepest and most far-reaching values in poetry. The essay, just as it is, would be a boon to many students and teachers who together are seeking to find each other as they attend to a poem.
>
> /s/Joseph H. Jenkins
> Petersburg, Va.

Here is the second letter:

> Dear Sir:
>
> I have just discovered, by way of John Ciardi's analysis of Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," that this charmingly simple, eloquent, lyrical little poem, long one of my favorites, is supposedly fraught with duplicity of meaning and symbolism, including a disguised death-wish, and that it is not at all about what it seems to be about.
>
> This is really a new high in critical absurdity. If the presentation of this leading, cover-feature article were not so obviously straight-faced, I would have considered this a nice parody of much present-day criticism. Who is Mr. Ciardi trying to kid? Or is he himself merely kidded? I am sure Mr. Frost must be highly amused or shaking in amazement at the awesome proportions his innocent poetic images have assumed ("By now, obviously, the horse has also become a symbol").
>
> /s/Mrs. Beverly Travers
> New Orleans, La.

Of course, Mrs. Travers has in a sense hit on a problem in Ciardi's analysis when she objects to his turning innocent poetic images like the horse into symbols. And the problem is that Ciardi didn't spend more time, let's say a chapter or book-length explanation of the horse as symbol in Western culture, in order to help readers like Mrs. Travers understand the context within which both Frost and Ciardi operate. Ciardi had to assume that his readers were, like himself, insiders because The Saturday Review is too brief a medium for outsiders.

Another good example of the outsider's mentality can be seen in an article in the Texas A&I newspaper, the South Texan, that appeared in the February 17, 1984, issue. The student wrote this:

> Last Thursday morning I happened to be in the Ben P. Bailey art building and was told that some of the artists who had contributed to the San Antonio artists' exhibit were going to lecture in the afternoon.
>
> Because I had been, for the most part, impressed by the exhibit, I returned. Robert Tiemann, chairman of Trinity University's art department, was there, along with Gail Kline . . . and Martha Fernstermaker.
>
> The two women unfortunately were quiet as Tiemann took the floor and proceeded to annoy me. He had the irritating habit of comparing art to pro football and told me to face after his lecture that my opinion wasn't as important as his.
>
> One of the points he harped on was that since any object can be art, the issue is whether it is good or bad art. And the distinction between good and bad art is not a matter of opinion but of educated logical deduction.
>
> That puts me, the exposed but not particularly well educated individual with respect to art, in the position of saying that I can't enjoy art as much as he can.
>
> I don't agree. Art should be looked at subjectively and no one's emotions are more important than anyone else's.

As English teachers we need to be able to respond to these cries for help when they confront us; and that's what they really are, cries for help. And so let me begin.

One of our jobs as English teachers is to interpret for our students the literary work in front of us; and if we define interpretation as the art of recovering the hidden meaning of a text, then we can see more clearly, I think, ust how basic the problem of secrecy is. You see, for us and especially for our students here in the twilight years of the twentieth century, secrecy is nothing less than the object of suspicion itself. It is the condition not of understanding but of disguise and deceit, the recourse of those who have something to hide or who cannot allow knowledge to occur. Secrecy presupposes someone, outsiders let's say, to be kept in the dark: it is a category of power rather than of thought. But from a historical perspective the concept of secrecy can be seen as perhaps the principal way in which the ancients responded to the primary hermeneutical question: What do you do when the text you are studying doesn't make sense? The ancients would say that you are now in the presence of the book's most sacred part: you have come upon one of its secrets and you must now begin to ponder it in earnest. The concept of secrecy was also a way of engaging a second question: Who can say what Scripture says? Who, in other words, is privy to the mind of God? So secrecy in this context pertains to the metaphysical disparity between the divine and the human. God's word will always resemble a secret because of the natural limitations of human understanding. Only God can understand himself plainly and directly, but before man God is always hidden or disguised.

The word hermeneutics, that I used just now and that I need perhaps to explain, has to do with the rules and philosophy of interpretation. Hermeneutics may have originally begun with the Scriptures, but this science has evolved into four parts: scriptural, judicial or legal, literary, and social. I am here concerned with scriptural and literary hermeneutics.

One traditional source of help for us in interpreting is the god Hermes, who is the patron of interpreters. He is also the patron of thieves, merchants, travelers, heralds, and what heralds pronounce. He has to do with oracles, including the dubious sort known as kledon, which at the moment of its announcement may seem trivial or irrelevant; but the secret sense of kledon declares itself only after long delay and in circumstances not originally foreseeable.

Hermes is also the god of going-between: between the dead and the living but also between the hidden or latent sense and the manifest sense, and between the text and the dying generation of its readers, in other words, between insiders and outsiders.

As I proceed I want to keep repeating the point in order to make it clear that students of orus are going to feel like outsiders much as we did before we became insiders and that this feeling of theirs is justified if we look at the whole literary tradition that we're introducing them to. Historically, this distinction between insiders and outsiders is also expressed in terms of the difference between the esoteric and the exoteric, the esoteric having to do with knowledge that insiders have and the exoteric referring to general, commonplace knowledge. One of the early Church fathers by the name of Origen wrote this: "But that there should be certain doctrines, not made known to the multitude, which are revealed after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems, in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric." The ancients, you see, routinely divided the world into exoteric and esoteric realms: these are basic categories of definition, like nature and culture. Cardinal Ximenes de Cisneros, who supervised the Scriptural Complutensian Polyglot that was published in 1522, figured the text this way:

> Certainly [he says] since there can be no word, no combination of letters, from which there does not arise, and as it were spring forth, the most concealed senses of the heavenly wisdom; and since the most learned interpreter cannot explain more than one of these, it is unavoidable that after translation Scripture yet remains pregnant and filled with both various and sublime insights which cannot become known from any other sources than from the very fountain of the original language.

Scripture, you see, is not a fully interpretable text; and the reason is its polysemous nature: to interpret or to translate is to bring forth a meaning; but in Scripture's case something is always left behind in the original, which remains pregnant and filled with both various and sublime insights. So, according to this insider, Cardinal Cisneros, we will always have a need for insiders with esoteric knowledge to provide us with more of those insights into the meaning of the Bible.

Christ himself was an insider with an ambiguous attitude toward outsiders, or we can say rather that he was an insider whose disciples expressed conflicting attitudes towards outsiders. You may remember the episode in the New Testament

when Jesus is preaching to a crowd, teaching them, we're told, "many things in parables." The first is the Parable of the Sower. And later, when Jesus is asked to explain the purpose of his parables, he describes them as stories told to outsiders with the express purpose of concealing a mystery that is to be understood only by insiders. At least this is the gist of Christ's reply as it comes down to us from Mark. So Mark tells us that, speaking to his twelve apostles, Jesus said, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear but not understand, lest at any time they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them" [4:11-12]. Only the insiders can have access to the true sense of these stories: "For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" [4:25]. So only those who already know the mysteries--what the stories really mean--can discover what the stories really mean. And the teacher, on the very occasion when he pronounced this rule, showed himself irritated with his elect for wanting explanations of what they, in principle, already knew. And if we are to believe St. Mark, they continued to be slow learners prone to absurd error. But they did know that plain stories mean more than they seem to say, that they contain mysteries inaccessible to all but privileged interpreters--and perhaps not always with any great measure of certainty even to them. So there is seeing and hearing, which are what naive listeners and readers do; and there is perceiving and understanding, which are in principle reserved to an elect. This, at any rate, is St. Mark's position; and his is a hard line. Robert Frost, you remember, knows about Mark because in his poem "Directive" he talks about a "broken drinking goblet like the Grail/ Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,/So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't." Toward the end of Chapter 4 St. Mark adds that privately Jesus explained all things to his disciples. Is it any wonder that another of the early Church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, calls the Scriptures "a prophetic and venerable system of concealment."

And over the centuries that make up the Christian era the concealments of the Old Testament are understood to have been fulfilled and made plain in the New Testament. You remember, perhaps, that St. John in Chapter 5 records that Jesus told the Jews, "You search the Scriptures, because in them you think that

you have life everlasting. And it is they that bear witness to me. . . . Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, in whom you hope. For if you believed Moses you would believe me also, for he wrote of me." You can see, then, I think, how it follows that if the Old Testamentcan only be understood in later time, then the New Testament may itself be subject to further determination. This is not merely a matter of allegory. It can be argued that just as the Old Testament signified the New Testament, so the New Testament signified the Church, which alone had power to determine its spiritual sense. For early theologians the spiritual sense authorized by the Church was the true literal sense; there was no appeal against the Church's judgment that could be based on the text itself. So the literal sense of the New Testament could in its turn be superseded.

Now, this supersession of senses by persons and institutions privileged to arrange it still goes on in institutions both secular and sacred. To some people it may seem to be a game of very limited interest, of concern, let's say, largely to monks and scholars. But it is far more than that. Without the transformation of the Old Testament the entire history of Christianity would have been different in all respects, from the liturgical to the political. And the implication that the New Testament might be similarly transformed is by no means merely a monkish fantasy: it is of great historical importance. It could be described as one cause of the Protestant Reformation. But it has other manifestations. In the twelfth century, Joachim da Fiore prophesied the imminent arrival of the third main epoch of world history, to follow those presided over by the first and second persons of the Trinity, which corresponded to the Old and New Testaments. A third gospel--the Everlasting Gospel--would supervene, to accompany the third age, the age of the Holy Spirit. This third gospel would be quite transparent, without enigmas, without figures; for there would be no more transformations. Time would be renewed; there would come an emperor for the Last Days, and an angelic pope. Joachim's doctines were almost immediately exploited in the imperial propaganda of Frederick II, who died in 1250. The latest manifestation of Joachim's doctrines was as Hitler's Third Reich. And there is no better example of the way in which a privileged interpretation, propounded by insiders believing that they alone have access to the true, spiritual sense of a text, may determin matters of life and death, unless it is the horrible success of Matthew's gospel that the Jews, after Pilate washed his hands, voluntarily took upon themselves and their children

the blood-guilt of the Crucifixion. According to Matthew, Pilate says, "'I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'" [27:24-25] Unless we're willing to believe that Matthew was actually present among the Jews before Pilate here, what we are faced with is literary interpretation. Matthew, we have reason to believe, was working from Mark's text. And the point here is that literary interpretations may take fictional form and that fictions, wrongly or literally read, may prey upon life, just as the Jews have been preyed upon.

In order to provide a context for you to understand my statement about literary interpretations taking on fictional form, I want to turn for a minute to a novel by the English novelist David Lodge entitled Souls & Bodies, which was published in 1980. One of the characters is a Catholic priest named Fr. Austin Brierly whose bishop decides to send him back to school to study Bible history. The passage I want to read to you also says a lot about insiders and outsiders:

> Austin Brierly found that things had changed a lot since his seminary days, especially in the field of biblical commentary. When he was a student, the methods of modern demythologizing historical scholarship had been regarded as permissible only in application to the Old Testament. The New Testament was taught as a historically reliable text, directly inspired by God and endorsed as such by the infallible authority of the Church. It came as something of a shock to discover that views mentioned formerly only to be dismissed as the irresponsible speculations of German Protestants and Anglican divines who could hardly be considered seriously as Christians at all, were now accepted as commonplace by many Catholic scholars in the field. The infancy stories about Jesus, for instance, were almost certainly legendary, it seemed, late accretions to the earliest and most reliable account of jesus's life in Mark. The baby in the stable at Bethlehem, the angels and the shepherds, the star in the sky and the three kings, the massacre of the Innocents by herod, the flight into Egypt--all fiction. Not meaningless, the books and articles and lectures hastened to add, for these fictions symbolized profound truths about the Christian faith; but certainly not factual, like the events one read about in the newspaper, or for that matter in Livy and Tacitus. And the Virgin Birth itself, then--was that a fiction? Well, opinion differed, but there were certainly many authorities who did not see that the literal, physical virginity of Mary (which was nowhere mentioned in Mark, Paul and John) was an essential part of the Gospel message. If this was accepted, then the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption also ceased to signify, they became dead letters, not worth arguing about. What was important was the figure of Jesus, the adult Jesus, himself. But here, too, a startling amount of skeptical sifting appeared to have taken place. The story of his baptism by John the Baptist was probably historical, but hardly the temptation in the desert, a narrative with obvious folktale characteristics deriving from the Jewish Babylonian exile, like the more

spectacular miracle stories, the walking on the water and the draught of fishes. And the Resurrection . . . ? Well, here even the most adventurous demythologizers hesitated (it was another kind of How Far Could You Go?) but a few were certainly prepared to say that the Resurrection story was a symbolization of the faith found by the disciples through Jesus's death, that death itself was not to be feared, that death was not the end. That was the essential meaning of the Resurrection, not the literal reanimation of Jesus's corpse, an idea that could not possibly be as meaningful to an intelligent Christian of the twentieth century as it was to the inhabitants of a pre-scientific world.

Austin Brierly almost rubbed his eyes in disbelief sometimes. He read the professional theological journals with much the same mixed feelings of shock and liberation as Michael [who is another character in the novel] read Lady Chatterley's Lover and the sexually explicit fiction that was published in its wake. Of course the theologians and exegetes were generally more discreet than the novelists. They expressed themselves with elaborate caution in learned journals of tiny circulation, or exchanged ideas with like-minded scholars in private. It was understood that one did not flaunt the new ideas before the laity, or for that matter before the ordinary clergy, most of whom were deplorably ill-educated adn still virtually fundamentalists when it came to the interpretation of the New Testament. The main thing was to get on quietly with the work of updating Catholic biblical scholarship while Rome was too pre-occupied with pastoral and liturgical experiment to bother checking up on them. Austin Brierly, however, was unable to take this view of the matter. It seemed to him that a dangerous gap was opening up between the sophisticated, progressive theologians and exegetes on the one hand, and ordinary parochial Catholics on the other. The latter still went on believing in the nativity story and the miracles of Our Lord and all the rest of it as literally, historically true. If they woke up one day to discover that their own "experts" hadn't believed these things for years, they would feel cheated, and might understandably give up the practice of their religion in disgust. It was, therefore, he concluded, the clear duty of priests like himself to try and educate the laity in the new, modern way of reading Scripture. [88-90]

Now when Fr. Brierly returns to pastoral work and tries to educate the laity, they complain to the pastor who in turn complains to the archbishop who demotes Fr. Brierly to a parish in the Midlands. Even archbishops, you see, have to protect outsiders from insiders.

What David Lodge is writing about here is a fictional version of an all-too-real dilemma for the modern Church. The July 21st, 1984, issue of the Corpus Christi Caller Times carried this article with a London dateline:

Did Jesus Christ walk on water? Was he born of a virgin? Do you have to believe he was both God and man to be a Christian?

No, says the Rev. David Jenkins, the Church of England's newest bishop. His appointment as the fourth most senior Anglican cleric in the land has thrust the church into one of its fiercest controversies in decades.

Appalled traditionalists say the scholarly 59-year-old Jenkins, theology professor at Leeds University in northern England, "denies

the very fundamentals of Christianity."

To add to conservative dismay, a poll has revealed that more than half the bishops in the Church of England share Jenkins' view that Christians are not obliged to believe that Jesus Christ was divine. . . .

Jenkins was chosen as bishop of the ancient north England diocese of Durham by a church commission headed by the archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Robert Runcie, leader of the 65-million member worldwide Anglican communion.

The hierarchy supports Jenkins in the confrontation between the traditionalists and liberal intellectuals who argue that New Testament miracles, taught as the basic creed to generations of Christians, were only symbolic stories--not historical events. . . .

I won't read the entire article to you, but this is the gist of it anyway. With this context in mind, we can return to the New Testament.

The synoptic gospels have the episode in which a lawyer asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. The answer is an unadorned declaration of the requirement to love God and one's neighbor. But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, says to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" The answer to this question is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. According to St. Luke, it is meant to interpret or explain the sense of the word neighbor. Of course, since the parable is a coherent narrative, it says more than is strictly necessary to make this point. A traveler is robbed and left wounded in a ditch. A priest and a Levite pass by without offering help, but a third passer-by goes to a lot of trouble and expense to help the victim. He is a Samaritan--a member of a nation despised by the Jews. The nature of his help is specified: he binds up the wounds, treats them with oil and wine, carries the half-dead man on his own beast to an inn, and, having left with the innkeeper a supply of money for further care, departs with a promise to return. Which of the three travelers proved neighbor to the wounded man?

Now here is a story that seems to be a simple exemplary tale. The details that could be called redundant to its merely exemplary purpose may be explained away as a gesture toward realism. The Jericho road is chosen because it was a road on which assaults were frequent. The Samaritan does all that he can to help the man, expending his supplies, forfeiting the use of his animal, giving the innkeeper a precisely specified sum of money (enough to cater for the man's needs over many days), and, so far from thinking that he had now discharged his neighborly duty, promising to come back and finish the good work. So the parable is saying that this is the way we ought to behave now, not in some storybook situation that may vaguely come to pass.

But this simple view of the parable is very far from having gained universal acceptance. And in understanding why this is so we happen upon an important reason for the ongoing nature of interpretation. My reading of the parable would not have seemed natural to the Church fathers. For them the Holy Spirit does not give details merely to please or reassure: in all his works every word and every figure is charged with sense. The fate of the traveler represents the fall of the human race into the hands of demons. He is Adam, who has left Jerusalem, the heavenly city, for Jericho, the world. The Samaritan is Christ, the inn is the Church, the promise to return is the Second Coming. To interpreters like Irenaeus, another of the early Church fathers, the story is loaded with hidden meanings; and although there will be a consensus as to certain of these meanings, there is no suggestion that the process will ever need to stop.

All stories are susceptible to this kind of interpretation. St. Augustine, interpreting the five loaves and two fishes of the First Feeding, says that the loaves are the books of Moses (they are made of barley, rough outside and hard to open, but containing much nourishment) while the fish represent Christ. The multiplication of the loaves is the exposition of the Mosaic Law. The people sat on the grass because, being carnally minded, they rested on sensual things. The fragments they left were truths of hidden import, such as they were unable to receive.

Historically, then, what we see is that once a text like the Old and New Testament is credited with high authority, it is studied intensely; and once it is studied this way it acquires mystery or secrecy. Revivals of learning did not destroy but fostered secrecy; and the Renaissance cult of esoteric wisdom survived the new literalism of the Protestant Reformation. This new literalism was propounded by outsiders who composed the Protestant tradition, that of the devout dissenter animated only by the action of the spirit, abhoring the claim of the institution to an historically validated traditional interpretation. For Martin Luther, for example, Scripture confounds interpretation by reason of its plainness. "Scripture," he says, "is its own interpreter--a self-authorizing, self-disclosing text: a book with nothing to hide because there is nothing that is hidden." For Luther, the text is made of letters which any schoolboy knows how to read. What is called the spirit is not concealed in the letter but is, he says, "inscribed only in the heart, and it is a living writing of the Holy Spirit." In such writing as this there is nothing that anyone cannot understand. And this belief that a text might be an open proclamation, available to all, coexisted

comfortably with the belief that it was a repository of secrets. This quality of sacred books is inherited by their counterparts in the secular world. Shakespeare is an inexhaustible source of occult readings, yet at the same time he is believed to speak plainly to any literate layman. Like the Scriptures, he is open to all, but at the same time so dark that special training, organized by an institution of considerable size, is required to interpret his writings. But this belief that the true meaning of literary works is hidden is not confined to professional corporations. Sigmund Freud knew when he wrote The Interpretation of Dreams that the belief in hidden meanings was one that he shared with most of the remainder of mankind, if not with his colleagues in psychology.

This dichotomy between insiders and outsiders can also be seen, I believe, when we read the published sermons of the university-trained Puritans of the 17th century. These sermons often included Latin, Greek, or Hebrew phrases, which the man in the pew was unable to understand. The man in the pew was also unlikely to be able to follow the tedious details of the preacher's arguments, put there more for the benefit of his fellow clergymen than for his own congregation. Some of this pedantry was used simply to awe the congregation and remind them of their inexpertness in religion, of their status as outsiders, in other words. The Puritan minister Richard Baxter wrote this in 1657: "It is most desirable that the Minister should be of parts above the people so far as to be able to teach them and awe them and manifest their weaknesses to themselves. . . . See that you preach . . . some higher points that stall their understandings. . . . Take up some profound questions and make it as plain as you can, that they may see that it is not your obscure manner of handling, but the matter itself that is too hard for them, so they may see that they are yet children that have need of milk." On the other hand, sectaries like the Quakers stressed the role of the spirit, who could reveal knowledge equally to poor as well as rich, to peasant as well as gentry. Quakers like George Fox believed that the teaching of the Spirit came without education. If so, then the masses as well as divines were equally able to discern the will of God. You can see, I think, just how this attack on the expert in religion was also an attack against the state because, if the common man, using the Scripture and enlightened by the Spirit, could discover all necessary religious truth, could not the common Englishman, using the Magna Charta or the dictates of natural law discoverable by reason, arrive at the conclusion that he had a right to speak for himself in political matters.

A London cobbler identified only as Mr. Vincent preached that all those who would not preach as cobblers and tinkers were damned. No human learning was necessary to be a minister. If the spirit didn't move a person to preach, he had no business preaching; or, as one sectarian poem written in 1662 goes,

> Wee'l down with all the Versities
> Where Learning if profest,
> Because they practice and maintain
> The Language of the Beast;
> Wee'l drive the Doctors out of doors,
> And parts what ere they be;
> Wee'l cry all Arts and Learning down
> And hey then up go we.

But Puritans disagreed with the sectaries. One Puritan argued this way: "If I could hear Fishermen or the like preach or write like the Apostles and speak all languages by the Spirit as they did; who of no scholars were suddenly changed into greater scholars, and better Orators than ever the World bred up in the best Universities, I would submit to their judgment." But since no Puritan ever observed such a phenomenon, they were concerned that education be a prerequisite if the blind were not to lead the blind. The problem was one of properly interpreting the traditional Protestant doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers."

The English writers of the 18th century, sometimes known as the Augustans, went further than ever before in applying the distinction between the elite and the mob, between insiders and outsiders. This distinction seems to have defined their basic conception of their role as writers: they were a small band, a righteous minority, ever battling for truth against every kind of deviation from the norm against the Dunces and the Foplings and the Virtuosos. In this context there arose a vision of a divided audience that made irony in the sense of speaking by contraries, a possible mode of discourse and almost an obligation. The chosen few--the men of wit, judgment, and learning--could be assumed to have considerable identity of attitude and understanding: to them you could speak as subtly and as elliptically as you wanted to. But to the many, the mob, you obviously could not. For example, the literary mob, the people in the largest category, could be persuaded that Lemuel Gulliver was a real person; and they were provided with the most elementary kind of story in the simplest kind of prose. And if you played the game well enough, you might even take in an Irish bishop. In a letter to his friend Alexander Pope (Nov. 27, 1726) Jonathan Swift wrote that "A Bishop here said, that Book [Gulliver's Travels] was full of improbable lies, and for

his part, he hardly believed a word of it." Even an Irish bishop could only take the book literally.

Now suppose you want to attack someone verbally by exposing him to shame and ridicule. In the 18th century you had two options: first, you could use banter and attack him personally in the vulgar dialect of the marketplace. The second option was better suited to the gentleman, though, because it was and still is rude to stick your tongue out in public whereas it is the very pink of politeness to praise you enemy with your tongue in cheek. And, besides, this obtuse way of insulting someone else is a lot harder to counter. Socratic irony is not a game that two can play very easily. Now suppose, also, that you wanted to attack the literary mob. You could do so by satirizing your own readers as Swift does in A Tale of a Tub when he has his spokesman-persona write, "Last week I say a woman flay'd, and you will hardly believe, how it altered her person for the worse." The clause "you will hardly believe" very casually places us as readers in with the mob, that is, with those who are habitually blind to the realities below the surface of things and to the cruelties of life, however much we may fancy ourselves to be "brimful of that Modern Charity and Tenderness" ironically alluded to at the end of this particular section of the Tale.

There are any number of reasons why writers are not explicit, but I would like to suggest two reasons why Swift was not. The first reason is perhaps the result of a quirk in his personality, and it's the least admirable. We know that Swift liked to hide his truth. For one thing he published nearly everything he wrote anonymously. For another thing, in his letters, in Gulliver's Travels, in his Journal to Stella, in a work entitled Polite Conversations, Swift made up little languages and elaborate linguistic jokes and cryptograms and riddles that people are still trying to untangle. And even though Gulliver's Travels was defended by his cousin Deane Swift as early as 1755 as a work of a religious moralist, it is only by examining the dates inside the work itself in terms of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer that we can now get an adequate sense of the book's religious nature. And take for another instance the names in Gulliver's Travels. They are the result of Swift's interest in ciphers and cryptography. Anagrams, for example, have been traditionally used by writers to conceal their identities or to find imaginary proper names for their characters. They are one of the oldest plays on words and consist in shuffling the letters or rearranging them in order to obtain a new, more or less fortunate meaning. This universal pastime is probably older than the oldest practioners of it that we know, the Kabbalists. It was sometimes so popular that official anagrammatists worked for

handsome salaries by special appointments to monarchs. The French writer Francois Rabelais hid his true identity as author of Gargantua and Pantagruel in the anagram Alcofrybas Nasier. Swift hid his name inside the anagram Lemuel Gulliver. How Swift derived this and the other names in Gulliver's Travels is explained by Pierre Henrion in a work published in 1971 entitled Gulliver's Secret.

Now, the second reason for Swift's silence is Christian. Like St. Mark and Robert Frost, Swift knew that Christ was exclusive rather than inclusive. For Swift the burden of Christ's message is that he came not to unite but to separate. This is the message of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats; and Christ says, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." It is not an infinitely forgiving Christ who makes people choose and who tells parables so that a chosen few can comprehend and the many must leave puzzled. This harsher Christ asserts that it will be given only if we ask and that we will find only if we seek. And this need to ask and seek became part of the literary context. Swift, for one, makes us ask and seek if we want to find out what he really means. A few years before Swift John Bunyan in his opening Apology for The Pilgrim's Progress defends his book in this way when some people objected to his obtuse way of preaching by telling a story. When people said, "Speak, man, thy mind . . .metaphors make us blind," Bunyan responded in this way:

> By metaphors I speak; were not God's laws,
> His Gospel laws, in olden time held forth
> By types, shadows and metaphors? . . .
> My dark and cloudy words they do but hold
> The truth, as cabinets inclose the gold.
> The prophets used my by metaphors
> To set forth truth. . . .
> Come, truth, although in swaddling clouts, I find
> Informs the judgement, rectifies the mind,
> Pleases the understanding, makes the will
> Submit; the memory too it doth fill
> With what doth our imagination please;
> Likewise it tends our troubles to appease. . . .
> But yet grave Paul him nowhere doth forbid
> The use of parables, in which lay hid
> That gold, those pearls, and precious stones that were
> Worth digging for, and that with greatest care.

Bunyan's defense of his art in the late 17th century is not something that writers today believe can be altogether dispensed with. Fr. Andrew Greeley makes much the same argument at the end of his novel entitled Thy Brother's Wife, published in 1982:

> Why would a priest [he says] write a novel, particularly a secular novel, about adultery, incest, and sacrilege?
>
> Why would Jesus tell parables about secular events like wedding banquets and ne'er-do-well sons and treasure hunters and adulterous women? Why would writers in the Jewish scriptures tell tales about passionate love affairs between unmarried young people (the Song of Songs), about adulterous kings (the David Cycle), and hateful, incestuous and murderous families (the Joseph Cycle)?
>
> The answer is that, since the beginning of humankind, religion has been most effectively communicated in stories that appeal to the whole person instead of being communicated in doctrinal treatises aimed at the intellect alone. The purpose of the religious tale is not to edify but to shatter preconceptions, to open up to the imagination new possibilities of living in the world and relating to the Ultimate.
>
> This particular religious story will be successful if the reader is disconcerted by a tale of commitments that are imperfectly made and imperfectly kept--but that are still kept. And by the image of a God who draws straight with crooked lines, who easily and quickly forgives, and who wants to love us with the tenderness of a mother.

In A Personal Afterword to his novel Ascent into Hell published in 1983 Fr. Greeley says this:

> Although most readers will find it easy to absorb the religious symbols or "sacraments" (realities that reveal the presence of grace, the presence of God in action) that bind this story together, perhaps the images ought to be made explicit for those who are unfamiliar with symbols or stubbornly refuse to see them--most notably Catholic reviewers, who will fail to comprehend the parallel with the Catholic sacraments: water, wind (spirit), breast (food and drink), light, descent and ascent, an open door, house, and woman (especially two lovely women, Peggy and Maria, who represent opposing views of how God acts and for that matter what the Church ought to be). . . .
>
> So, light-years away from them in skill, my comedy of grace seeks to do, however ineptly, what the parables of Jesus did--tell a story of how God acts. Perhaps the reader will be disconcerted by my imagining that God may act like Maria and Maria like God. Comedians both and masters of graceful surprise, God and Maria are, as the theologians would say, "correlates" of one another.
>
> Perhaps the reader who can imagine Maria as a sacrament of God and a revelation of how God works, will then be able to see new ways of living in the light of a story of a God who, like Maria, is illusive, reckless, vulnerable, joyous, unpredictable, irrepressible, unremittingly forgiving, and implacably loving.

Still another writer who makes life for his readers difficult is the 18th-century writer Henry Fielding, who in his novel Tom Jones speaks to his readers in this way:

> Bestir thyself, therefore, on this occasion; for, though we will always lend thee proper assistance in difficult places, as we do not, like some others, expect thee to use the arts of divination to discover our meaning, yet we shall not indulge thy laziness where nothing but thy own attention is required; for thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine that we intended, when we began this great work, to leave thy sagacity nothing to do; or that, without sometimes exercising this talent, thou wilt be able to travel through our pages with any pleasure or profit to thyself. (Bk. XI, Ch. ix)

In another novel of his entitled Joseph Andrews, Fielding has this to say about the difficulty of understanding his story:

> It is an observation sometimes made, that to indicate our idea of a simple fellow, we say, "He is easily to be seen through": nor do I believe it a more improper denotation of a simple book. Instead of applying this to any particular performance, we choose rather to remark the contrary of this history, where the scene opens itself by small degrees; and he is a sagacious reader who can see two chapters before him. For this reason, we have not hitherto hinted a matter which now seems necessary to be explained.

What these passages from Swift and Greeley and Fielding show is, I believe, the Christian context that has had such a profound influence on our secular literature.

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest some specific and some not-so-specific ways that we can turn our students into sagacious readers and into insiders. There are two books by Wilson Bryan Key that I think are helpful. One is entitled Subliminal Seduction and the other is Media Sexploitation. Whether or not you agree with him on the issue of subliminal seduction in television advertising, his books made the important point about the pervasive use of symbols in advertising. Too few people understand just how pervasive symbols are in our culture so that they come to the study of literature as doubting Thomases. I also like to use tape recordings of popular songs by way of introducing my students to the world of poetry. One excellent song for this purpose is "Bridge over Troubled Waters" by Simon and Garfunkel. Wilson Key analyzes this song in Media Sexploitation. His interpretation stands or falls, I think, on his contention that the word silvergirl in the song is a street euphemism for a hypodermic syringe. If he is right, and I suspect that he is, then Wilson Key has thrown out all the heart-warming reassurances that I as an outsider have ever experienced while listening to this song. Until his book came along, I obviously had never worked hard enough to become, in this instance, an insider. I was obviously not a sagacious listener. Still another suggestion is that before getting too deeply into

literature, you can look at magazine ads in class that rely heavily on symbols. And if you're particularly brave, you can bring bumper stickers into class. You can also look at the metaphorical, which is to say poetic, quality of a piece of ordinary prose so that when you get to the literature your students won't accuse you of "dreaming it all up."

I am not suggesting that our job as interpreters of literature is an easy one, especially not at this time. In her book entitled Liberal Parents, Radical Children, Midge Decter argues that technology and psychology, the delusion that everything can be controlled and understood, led liberal parents into the prideful error of supposing that they could give their children a birthday present of a pain-free life. And she warns young people against "accepting any further counsel from those who would seek to absolve you of what might be considered difficult or unpleasant tasks. . . . Those who have so loudly and for so long professed to be your friends have deceived you," she says. "A thinker, or a book, with ideas to impart that you do not already understand and agree with is immediately dubbed 'boring' or 'irrelevant' and must immediately forfeit all claims upon you. For some reason, it seems never to occur to you that a failure to comprehend, to appreciate, to grasp a subtlety not already present in your own considerations might be a failure of your own. . . . The entireworld of thought and art comes to you filtered through a single supreme category of judgment: has it succeeded, or has it failed, by your own lights to move you? Does it or does it not 'turn you on'?" Midge Decter goes on to say that we need to develop less realization of self and more realization of others. We need less faith in our own improvisations and more respect for the wisdom of centuries. We need, she says, a sense of history. And what I have tried to do here today is to provide that sense of the history of insiders and outsiders so that all of us, teachers and students, can find, at the instep arch of an old cedar at the waterside, that broken drinking goblet like the Grail.

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